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ABSTRACT

This study investigates Taiwanese parents' opinions on sex education for young children. Participants in the study included 97 randomly selected Taiwanese parents of 3 through 5-year old children at three different preschools in northern Taiwan. Results indicate that subjects' age and education influenced parental views toward sexual issues: younger or well-educated parents professed more liberal views than other groups. Even so, most Taiwanese parents held positive attitudes toward sex education for young children, agreeing that children need sex education, that parents should offer sex education at home, and that preschools should provide sex education. A majority of parents seemed insufficiently prepared to carry on a conversation about sex and most did not believe that sexuality and morality should be separate from each other. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with Taiwan's current sex education, believing it too conservative, and they wished to improve the situation. Although parents have difficulties in dealing with young children's curiosity about sex, researchers have provided little help for teachers and parents to teach children about sex. The author lists four guidelines for parents and teachers to foster proper attitudes toward sex. Included are 27 statistical pie charts, a copy of the questionnaire, and statistical summaries. Contains 26 references. (RJM)

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Parental Attitudes Toward Sex Education for Young Children in Taiwan

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Abstract

A survey was used to determine the attitudes and perspectives of 95 parents of preschoolers in Taiwan. Data analyses revealed no significant difference at the .05 level of significance (α=. 05) between individual characteristics and their viewpoints toward human sexuality and sex education for young children. The results showed the trend indicating that parental opinions were related to age and educational attainment. References were made between Taiwanese parents' ideas and American researchers' comments. The reference indicated agreements between these two groups.

Parental Attitudes Toward Sex Education for Young Children in Taiwan

People conventionally believe that pre-puberty is the age of innocence (Johnson, 1977), and some parents assume that sex education should start when children enter puberty or even not until they encounter the first nocturnal emission or menstrual period (Elkind 1989; Gordon, 1975). On the other hand, people still believe that sex and sexual topics are private and sensitive, and they are matters to be kept under the table. Although mass media exposes a great number of sex-related messages every day, many people still have vague or inaccurate knowledge about sex and sexuality. However, these phenomena seem to be universal and similar situations happen to the Taiwanese.

There is a wealth of literature in America about sex education and parental attitudes on this issue. The following paragraphs summarize thinking regarding contemporary sex education, young children's sexual behaviors, and parental opinions.

Contemporary sex education

From the 1970s, developing research indicated that the majority of parents supported the proposal that schools provide sex education course in the United States of America (Kelly, 1981). Yet, at the time, instruction was mainly focused on teaching physical anatomy, hygiene, and other factual information about sex, while more political or social controversies involving sex seemed to be unconsidered. Consequently, most schools failed to link sex courses with other sexual aspects, such as sex stereotypes, values clarification and decision-making ability (Kelly, 1981; Martinson, 1981; Szirom, 1988).

Sex education is improving, but laggardly. Bruess & Greenberg (1988) points to a tendency that schools have remained the major source of formal sex education, but other institutions, such as churches, health departments, professional schools, and even some types of clubs offer a course, and the number is increasing. In addition, more literature and audiovisual materials are available to facilitate the teaching. Also, people are becoming more comfortable with using precise terminology and correct names when referring to body organs and their functions. Another trend shows schools no longer provide sex education for older children only, but also for those in preschool and at kindergarten levels. Moreover, educators teach students of the same sex as well as their counterparts.

On the contrary, many people are against sex education because they believe the less children know, the less possible it will be for them to engage in sexual activity or experiments (Denney & Ouadagno, 1988).

Young children's sexuality and behaviors

Modern research indicates that children show sexual interest naturally from infancy, and to them sexual curiosity is like the instinctive impulses of eating and sleeping (Chilman, 1990; Denney & Ouadagno, 1988; Segal & Segal, 1993). For example, Langfeldt's (1981) study on infantile sexuality noted that male infants have penile erections, while females show vaginal lubrication and clitoral erection shortly after birth. During infancy, babies masturbate from accidental discovery resulting from body movement and spontaneous sexual arousal.

Often by age five, when children are ready for preschool, most of them show great curiosity and interest in learning about sex and reproduction as much as in learning about their environment (Hansen, 1982; Segal & Segal, 1993; Taylor, 1981). Adults may notice that children ask questions about reproduction when they have a new-born baby at home or around their life (Bernstein, 1978): "What is that?", "What do mommies and daddies do?", and " Where does a baby come from?". Children's curiosity is not satisfied only by asking

questions but also by masturbating and exploring their own or others' bodies (Bruess & Greenberg, 1988). Preschool children for instance often masturbate less, but focus more on other forms of exploration, such as playing doctor (Yates, 1978). Usually it is not harmful for children to explore their bodies, but the prolonged genital play could signal that they are bored or insecure (Taylor, 1981). Compared to adults, children's sexual behavior is just sensate-erotic pleasuring, not procreative.

Young children being considered too young to comprehend what sex is are often turned down when they express sexual issues. Nevertheless, children learn whether taught directly or not. Children learn sex and sexuality in a gradual series of steps in accordance with Jean Piaget's beliefs in cognitive development, by interacting with the environment and people around them, then by assimilating and accommodating what is happening (Bernstein, 1978; Medora, 1992). Children use different strategies to satisfy their curiosities and questions about sex. If adults around them do not provide a proper model or give inaccurate information about sexuality, children may either draw the wrong conclusions based upon inaccurate knowledge or they will make up their own explanations (Bruess & Greenberg, 1988; Roberts & Holt, 1980). If children are refused answers or ridiculed because of their questions, they tend to turn to peers for answers. Yet, most of the time, the peers do not have accurate knowledge, either.

Denney & Ouadagno's (1988) finding shows that in the United States, most children learn about sexuality through reading, joking, or interacting with peers rather than parents. Overall, if children do not receive positive messages about sexuality, they could consider sexuality as bad and secretive, and have the orientation to hide it (Martinson, 1981). Furthermore, children may grow up unable to talk about sexual needs and feelings (Roberts & Holt, 1980).

Parental attitudes

The living environment has a greater impact on sexuality learning than does any other factor (Monat-Haller, 1992). It goes without saying that parents play the most essential part, and that their attitudes often influence greatly children's behavior. Regardless of whether parents mention the word "sex" or not, they still are the major sex educators for children (Kelly, 1981). Also, parents do not necessarily intend to pass messages to children, and no matter how hard they try not to talk about sex, they convey a message to children through tones, facial expression, or body languages about their feelings and attitudes about sex (Newman & Newman, 1986). Generally, parental attitudes toward sex education for young children are inclined to be conservative. Many factors contribute to parental thinking patterns regarding sex education for their children.

First, many parents feel uneasy and do not know how to talk about reproduction and other sex-related topics to children due to their own emotional discomfort (Bernstein, 1978). One way that many parents subtly express an uneasiness about sex is they tend not to show their affection and love by hugging or kissing each other in front of children. As a result, children often find it difficult to imagine that their parents have a sexual relationship or might interpret that hugging and kissing is dirty and only a preliminary for sexual intercourse (Denney & Ouadagno, 1988; Gordon, 1975). Kelly (1981) also mentions that many parents are afraid that discussing sex with their children will give the children insight into the parents' personal sex lives, or that talking about sexuality might lead children into sexual experiments. Yet parents often do not realize that it is ignorance, not knowledge that stimulates inappropriate sexual behavior (Gordon & Everly, 1978).

Another problem arises out of parents not having adequate knowledge about sexuality. They are puzzled about how to talk with children and how far they should go when confronting children's questions about sex. Those who do not have accurate knowledge about human sexuality are even likely to mislabel or negatively label the body organs and functions (Bernstein, 1978). As a result, children are confused, misled, and even think improperly about human physical

attributes by having inaccurate knowledge (Martinson, 1981). Furthermore, if children find out true information from others, they may distrust parents as a reliable source (Roberts & Gagnon, 1978).

Finally, parents are inclined to interpret children's sexual behaviors from grown ups' viewpoints, so they are not willing to encourage children to explore or be interested in sexual issues, or they often have negative responses toward children's sexual behavior (Martinson, 1981). It is not unusual to see that parents who interpret masturbation as harmful and feel it should be inhibited are shocked by children's genital play or masturbation. However, parent's negative reactions hinder the formation of affectional relations between parents and children, and are more destructive than children's early body exploration (Gordon, 1975; Gordon & Everly, 1978).

Purpose of the study

This study was developed to find out if the Taiwanese parents' opinions and attitudes toward sex education for preschool children are different among themselves due to individual characteristics, and, secondly, if their opinions reflect the current literature about sex education for preschoolers in America.

Rationale

Because I plan to work with young children in a preschool setting after going back to my country, Taiwan, I am interested in finding out parents' ideas about sex education. It is my understanding that people in Taiwan still hold conventional attitudes toward human sexuality and sex education, although they have been affected by other countries in different ways, such as international trade and popular cultures. Also, most Taiwanese parents do not take sex education seriously and their attitudes are likely to be conservative toward teaching sex-related knowledge to their children. I would like to gain information about modern parents' perspectives on this issue, and to see if they are retaining conservative opinions toward sex education, for I believe that the more I understand the parents' thinking, the higher the possibility is that I can communicate with them efficiently.

Methodology

Subjects

The subjects in this study were 97 Taiwanese parents of 3 through 5-year-old children at three different preschools in Taoyuan city, located near Taipei in the northern Taiwan. The subjects were randomly selected and varied in terms of gender, age, educational

attainment, financial ability and occupation.

The subjects were drawn from three local preschools, but were mixed for analysis. Of the 97 cases, 95 were valid, and two were unusable because the children were older than five. Among these valid cases, 62 respondents were females, 31 were males, and the other two data were missing (see Figure 1). As expected, more mothers then fathers answered the survey, since the mother is often the main caretaker for young children. All the respondents were above 21 and under 45 years of age, with majority of parents clustered in the age range of 31 to 35 (see Figure 2).

As to the subjects' educational attainment, 78 respondents (83 %) of the subjects had finished senior high school, which was reasonable, since senior high school is the highest level of compulsory education in Taiwan (see Figure 3).

The approximate income level of all subjects quite evenly allocated at different levels which ranged from 410 to more than 2,310 U.S. Dollars per month (see Figure 4). 81.7 % of them had earned more than 20,000 New Taiwanese Dollars (about 750 U.S. Dollars) per month and were considered to have decent lives in Taiwan. However, this approximate individual income did not include those of their spouses, who also might have had full-time or part-time jobs. Thus, it implied

most of the households led modest lives. As to profession, the subjects were from all walks in the society, but most of them claimed to hold a business-related occupation (see Figure 5).

The largest group, 48.9 %, of the subjects had 5-year-old children at these preschools and it made sense for people not to send younger children to preschools if there was a grandmother or a relative to take care of them. (see Figure 6).

Apparatus

The instrument administered in this study was a questionnaire, which was designed first in English then translated into Chinese for the intended subjects. The survey was designed by the author based upon a literature review, and was modified by Dr. Crook and Dr. Herbert at Curry education school before being translated into Chinese. Parents were not asked to give their names in order to insure honest responses and protect their identity.

The three page questionnaire (Appendix A: English version & B: Chinese version) was organized into four parts. The first part was to collect demographic information. Subjects were asked to indicate their gender, age, educational level, approximate income, occupation, and their child's age in the specific preschools.

Part Two was composed of six questions, and subjects were asked to answer questions about when they asked their parents about sex and when dealing with their children's sex questions.

This third section was designed to research what kind of attitudes Taiwanese parents had toward sex issues, and if they tended to be conservative or liberal. Respondents who were more open-minded were likely to disagree on Question 1, 2, 6 to 10, 13, and 14 and agree on 3 to 5, 11, 12, and 15. Respondents were required to rate on a four-point Likert-type Scale from "Strongly Disagree (SD)", "Disagree (D)", "Agree (A)", and "Strongly Agree (SA)" about their attitudes.

The last section included two open-ended questions to inquire subjects' opinions about current sex education in Taiwan and the necessity of sex education for preschoolers.

Procedure

A letter and a survey were faxed to Taiwan. The distribution and collection of the surveys were done by Chia-chen Lu, this author's sister, who is working in one of the specific schools. Next, the subjects' children were asked to bring surveys home for parents since most of the children were transported by school bus. 97 surveys were handed in by the children within a week. Overall, it took about four weeks to

send the surveys back and forth between the United States and Taiwan.

Results

120 surveys were distributed and 97 were returned. Thus, the return rate of these schools were 80 %, 75 %, and 83 % respectively, and the total return rate was about 79 % without processing a follow up. Since not every subject answered every question, some data were unavailable and the fifteen items had different numbers of responses.

Part One: Demographic information

Information about all subjects is mentioned in *Subject* section, and is not discussed here again.

Part Two: Personal experiences of dealing with sexual questions

This part contained information about subjects' personal experiences while handling sexual issues. Among 92 subjects, 63 (68.5 %) indicated they had never asked their parents anything about sex, and just 6 of them remembered asking questions before 6 years old (see Figure 7). As to Question 2, "Did your parents tell you where you came from?", 49 out of 88 said "No", and 38 "Yes" (see Figure 8). The third question, " Which answer did you get?" from those who gave positive

answer in Question 2 was answered in the following way. Among the 45 people, 18 (40.0 %) replied their parents told them that they "came out of stone", which is a legend of birth among Taiwanese. It is borrowed from the classical Chinese fantasy with historical background, "The King of Monkey", whose main character, a monkey, came out of stone. Another incorrect reply, such as "children are from trash bins", was as interesting as American storks or Cabbage Patch Babies, which were amusing but misleading. 13 (28.9 %) replied that their parents gave them "a correct answer" (see Figure 9). Still 9 subjects (20 %) chose the item "Others", but none of them had received precise answers. For example, two responded that they were told they came out of mother's "belly" through Cesarean Section, and one was told to have come through mother's urethra.

Subjects were also asked if their children had asked questions about sex, and what kind of responses they gave. 70 of 88 subjects showed that their children had asked about where they came from, and their responses were quite diverse (see Figure 10-12). The largest group, 41 of 69 (59.4 %), indicated that they had given children a correct answer, and the second largest, 17 out of 69 (24.6 %) participants believed their children were too young to understand this issue. For those whose children had not yet had this question, the largest group, 12 of 19 (63.2 %), would have liked to give children correct information about birth, still 6 people (31.6 %) thought children were too young to

capably understand it.

Part Three: Parental attitudes toward sex education

Figures 13 to 27 show the numbers and percentages of these four categories of the respondents in rating from SD to SA. In the following discussion, the SDs and Ds are combined, so are the As and SAs for easy understanding.

The first five items concerned subjects' personal opinions toward sex. Generally, subjects disagreed on Question 1, 2, and 3, but they agreed upon Question 4, and 5. 58.7 % of the respondents disagreed that "Sex is an embarrassing topic" (Q1); 76.9 % of the subjects disagreed "Just adults understand what sex is" (Q2); 87.9 % of them disagreed that " Sex is not a moral issue" (Q3). However, respectively, 83.3 % and 65.2 % of the respondents agreed about the statements, "I feel more liberal about sex than my parents do" (Q4), and "Sex is a basic appetite like hunger" (Q5).

Question 6 to 9 were related to children's sexuality and their sexual behaviors. Most subjects agreed on Questions 6 to 8, and disagreed on Question 9. 64.8 % of the subjects believed " Children will understand where babies were from when they grow up" (Q6); 60.4 % of them marked "Children should be punished for using dirty words"

(Q7); 74.4 % agreed "Children should be forbidden to masturbate" (Q8); 74.2 % disagreed that "It is silly to think of young children (below 5) as sexual beings" (Q9).

Question 10 to 15 dealt with parental opinions about sex education for young children. Overall, most subjects had agreement on Question 11, 12, 14, and 15. They had disagreement on Question 10 and 13. 82.4 % of the respondents disagreed that "3 to 5-year-old children do not need any sex education" (Q10), and 84. 6% disagreed with the statement, "I do not want preschool to provide sex education for my children" (Q13). The majority of the subjects agreed on the following items with different percentages, although percentages varied. 70.8 % of the respondents agreed that " Parents are more responsible than school in providing sex education for young children"(Q11); 82.6 % agreed " There is nothing I would be afraid to discuss with children about sex education" (Q12); 52.9 % answered that "I do not know how to communicate with my children about sex" (Q14); lastly, 88.9 % believed the statement that "I would like to teach my children about sex at home" (Q15).

Table 1 lists the percentages of parents having liberal and conservative attitudes (see Table 1). Overall, Taiwanese parents seemed to have more liberal than conservative attitudes, especially those questions regarding education for children, but they did not

understand the nature of sexuality. Among these questions, the five highest ranking ones, whose percentages are over 80, and the lowest five ones of under 50 percentages, are listed below and will be discussed briefly.

Most parents were of the same broad mind in: teaching children about sex at home (Q15), welcoming preschool to provide sex education for children (Q13), feeling more liberal about sex than their parents (Q4), being not afraid to discuss sex issues with children (Q12), and consenting that young children need sex education (Q10).

On the other hand, the respondents are less liberal regarding the following statements: knowing how to communicate issues about sexuality with children (Q14), disciplining children for using dirty words (Q7), believing children can understand where babies come from (Q6), dealing with children's masturbation (Q8), and the relationship between sex and morals (Q3).

The results showed that there was not much statistical significance between individual characteristics, such as gender, age, education, and parental attitudes toward sex education. It may be due to the sampling size and selection process. However, there were trends to show a couple of the variables were likely to affect the subjects' viewpoints. Individual variables will be discussed separately in the

following paragraphs.

Gender

In the study, females and males shared similar opinions regarding these fifteen items (see Table 2). Females were considered more liberal concerning seven items (Question 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 15), while males were more liberal in the other eight items. Besides, the finding indicated that females had more understanding about children's sexuality while males were more aware about the nature of sex and sex education for children. The outcome supported the fact that the gender variable was independent of sexual issues.

Age

In Taiwan, women usually get married around 25 and men around 30, so it made sense that most of the age of preschoolers' parents fall in the range of 31-35. Here, the subjects were divided into three groups, those who were under 30 (including 30), 31-35, and above 36 (including 36), for the purpose of finding out if there was any significance.

Although the result was not statistically significant, younger parents tended to be more liberal in five questions (Question 1, 5, 11 to

13). Among these five, younger respondents also seemed to welcome sex education, but did not have clear ideas about children's sexual behaviors (see Table 3).

Educational achievement

Despite the fact that educational achievement did not show a statistical significance, either, it contained a strong trend, compared to other subjects' attributes, that subjects' education did affect parental attitudes toward topics about sex (see Table 4).

Overall, college educated people tended to be more liberal than the other two groups, reflected in the higher percentages on eight questions (Question 5 to 8, and 10 to 13). In addition, the participants with more educational background were more open-minded toward the themes related to children's sexuality besides the sex education. This suggests that this particular variable may have had greater impact on sex issues if the sample size had been larger.

Income level

Because of the sampling size, each original income level did not contain many subjects, and the six small intervals were rearranged into three groups.

Table 5 shows no prediction that the income level was dependent on and affects the attitudes of parents (see Table 5). Moreover, the different income situations did not support inclination to believe that income influenced parents' ideas even if the sample size was increasing.

Occupation

Most of the subjects were clustered in a white collar field (see Table 6). There was no statistical significance to support the fact that occupation and these questions were associated, but teachers and health services people (doctors or nurses) seemed to have more liberal views than people in other fields. Parents in health services field (4 of 95) had higher percentages on nine questions (Question 1, 2, 4, 8 to 10, 12, 13, and 15), and so did teachers (Question 2, 4 to 8, 10, 12, and 13). Comparing the two groups, teachers held less conventional opinions about children's sexuality, which was not expected, since usually people in health services have more knowledge about human sexuality. The two groups did not differ much in other questions. However, the subjects in the two specific fields were too few and might create bias.

Part Four: Open-ended questions

Respectively, 72 of 95 (75.7 %) and 67 (70.5 %) respondents provided answers to the two open-ended questions.

In reply to the first question, "What is your opinion about current sex education in Taiwan?", respondents gave a great variety of answers. Some believed the current sex education in Taiwan was still conservative and needed to be improved, but there were subjects who considered sex education unimportant. Appendix C shows the frequency of their responses under five times. The answers that were given over five times are listed below. They are: lack of appropriate sex education (31)[1], people hold conservative attitudes toward sex education (13), people do not have right attitudes toward sex education (10), mass media and other improper channels of information mislead and confuse children (8), and it is more open and better than before (6).

A similar proportion of the respondents answered the second question, "What , if anything, should children between the age 3 and 5 learn in sex education classes in school?" Again, the respondents gave a large variety of answers. The answers about what children should learn, mentioned over five times, are listed below: the biological

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[1]. The numbers in the following ( ) are the sum of the respondents of the total 95 ones.

differences and the functions of organs of boys and girls (44), the truth of "Where am I from?" or knowledge about reproduction (20), how to protect oneself and prevent sexual abuse (11), using materials, such as movies, pictures, video tapes, or cartoons to introduce the body organs and functions (7).

Yet, it is notable that five subjects were against sex education for young children because they believed 3 to 5-year-old children were still too young for receiving this particular kind of education. Also, several respondents expressed their opinions about sex education but these replies were not related to this question and were considered unacceptable. Appendix D lists the frequency of answers under five times, and parents' opinions about sex education.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to find out Taiwanese parents' opinions about sex education for young children. The results presented that the subjects' attributes, especially age and education, did affect their views toward sexual issues. However, as indicated by the results, subjects' different characteristics did not show much significance concerning sexual issues, thus this discussion focuses on general opinions and attitudes of parents.

Despite the fact that it is a consensus that Chinese or other Asian people are more narrow-minded in sexual matters, and Americans seem to be open to sexual issues, the results indicated that Taiwanese did share similar perspectives to Americans.

Although most of the subjects (83.3 %) felt themselves more liberal than the last generation, they agreed that children should be punished for using dirty words and be forbidden to masturbate. What strategies and reasons parents had, if they explained, and how they stop children using from dirty words or masturbating was unclear here. However, as shown by the results, most of the Taiwanese parents did not have enough accurate information about children's sexuality. These parents were likely to inhibit children's body exploration and masturbation, and express a negative message which may form guilt feelings toward one's body, and further affects healthy sexuality in adulthood (Denney & Ouadagno, 1988).

79.5 % of the respondents indicated that their children did have questions about sex. It reflects Segal & Segal's (1993) statement that most children were interested in learning about sex and reproduction by five. Yet, a portion of the parents still believed that young children were not old enough to discuss sex, and 64.8 % of the participants thought children would understand human reproduction anyway when they grow up. Roberts & Holt's study in 1980, which involved

interviewing over 1400 parents of 3 to 11-year-old children, found that parents often consider children, especially young children, as too young to understand sex and sexuality.

The findings implied that parents might be willing to help children understand human sexuality. This statement was supported by parents' high percentages of agreement that: children do need sex education, parents have more responsibility in providing young children sex education at home than in school, and the idea that preschool provides sex education is desirable. Yet, a majority of the parents seemed not to have enough accurate knowledge and confidence to carry on a conversation and to maintain communication. This phenomena did reflect the dilemma regarding sex education professionals now that more and more parents are eager to learn how to teach sex and sexuality topics, but they themselves are confused, since they have not been taught to discuss sex issues openly and often have received incorrect information from other people (Bernstein, 1978; Kelly, 1981).

In general, most of the participants were dissatisfied with Taiwan's current sex education and they were concerned with improving the situation. Basically, parents felt the present sex education tended to be conservative, so an appropriate curriculum in sound sex education was needed. A number of parental ideas toward

sex education were quite accurate, and supported by American researchers' comments, although they did not necessarily gain much frequency. Four participants indicated that parents need to give factual and age-appropriate answers for easy understanding. Parental thinking that sexuality education should start early and begin at home was also mentioned in similar studies (Martinson, 1981; Medora, 1992; Roberts & Gagnon, 1978).

Parents also expressed their worry that mass media can mislead children, since nowadays public communication systems provide a great deal of sexual learning and values for children, including both positive and negative messages (Roberts & Gagnon, 1978). A few subjects indicated that parents did not have enough knowledge about sexuality and might need professional assistance. These reasons might help explain why many parents were not able to communicate sexual issues to children. Still, a parent showed misunderstanding in thinking that sex education motivates youths to do sexual experimentation. The misconception, pointed out by Zelnick and Kim (1982), is that there is a relationship between having sex and sex education.

87.9 % of the subjects disagreed with the statement that sex is not a moral issue. To the Chinese, morality means not only to judge right from wrong, but also act according to conventional norms. It is a

consensus that love and sex are highly correlated, and so it is echoed by parental opinions of current sex education. A couple of parents believed that current sex education did not emphasize enough moral teaching. As also mentioned in American literature, sexual education ought to implant the value of sex and love (Szirom, 1988).

An encouraging trend found in this study was that a great many of the parents (70.5 %) held positive attitudes toward sex education for young children, despite the fact that several of the participants did not believe it was necessary. Overall, parents' concerns and their suggestions were confirmed by researchers' proposals about what children at the preschool level should learn.

Like American educators, most of the subjects believed that preschoolers should know first the biological differences and functions of body parts of the two sexes. Secondly, young children also should possess the basic knowledge that babies develop in a uterus (Bernstein, 1978), and have understanding about human sexuality. Thirdly, children require the skills of taking care of and respecting other and self's bodies to prevent themselves from being abused (Carton & Allen, 1993; Rousey, 1991). Fourthly, parents or other concerned people may use books, movies, or other materials to help children understand sexuality in a non threatening way (Elkind, 1989; Rousey ,1991). Lastly, a few of the parents' perceptions were supported by Bruess & Greenberg

(1988) that preschool sex education and education about sexuality should include a recognition of the roles in marriage and family.

Conclusion

It is clear that most Taiwanese parents had positive attitudes toward sex education for young children, and their opinions about sexuality also agreed with much of the research among Americans. Despite the fact that there was not great statistical significance between parents' different attributes and perspectives, younger or well-educated subjects seemed to have more liberal views than other groups toward this issue.

The outcomes of this study showed that the Taiwanese parents did not believe sexuality and morality should be separate from one another, and they tended to have limited knowledge about human sexuality. However, they did have a strong willingness and interest in taking responsibility for their children's sex education and introducing sexual matters in home settings.

Regarding the current sex education in Taiwan, the participants had more negative than positive responses and indicated a great deal of improvement was needed. As to sex education for young children,

they had much agreement with American researchers about how parents or other involved adults could help children build accurate and positive understandings about human sexuality.

Implications of the study suggest that parents seemed to have difficulties in dealing with young children's curiosity about sex, yet researchers provide a few feasible guidelines for teachers and parents to help children foster proper attitudes toward sex.

First, adults should understand that sexuality is significant to young children. The lesson of sexuality may well begin at birth, since touching and other interactions are essential for them to grow, and usually an infant's sexuality is related to healthy development because of the close relationship between the infant and its caretaker (Bernstein, 1978; Denney & Ouadagno, 1988; Elkind, 1989; Yates, 1978). Also talk about sex should be a continuous process from infancy to adolescents (Bernstein, 1978; Gordon, 1975).

Secondly, parents have the primary influence on children's gender identity and their sexual attitudes by age three (Gordon, 1975). If parents feel comfortable about their sexuality, children learn to lead sexually healthy lives. If parents are affectionate with each other and to their children, the children will learn to be caring and loving, too (Gordon & Everly, 1978).

Thirdly, adults should overcome the feelings of embarrassment and avoid using negative expressions while handling sexual issues with children. Kelly (1981) stated, "Good sex education never makes anyone feel obligated to talk his or her sexual feelings and behaviors". Parents can foster appropriate attitudes in the following ways. Parents should not take children's questions as being naughty, and should avoid harsh reactions to children's sexual behaviors, because most of the time, children are just curious and want to know the fact (Maxim, 1989; Segal & Segal, 1993). Usually, children's sexual play is as regular as playing house, certainly more play than sex. Besides, parents can instill the concept of privacy, and set limits of children's sexual explorations by asking children not to masturbate in front of people.

Finally, parents ought to have correct and complete knowledge about sex, which should be realistic and appropriate for children's developmental levels (Bernstein, 1978; Kelly, 1981; Medora, 1992). How parents explain sexual issues is also essential. Parents should answer children's questions in a matter-of-fact way (Denney & Ouadagno, 1988; Maxim, 1989), be open for discussing all topics on human sexuality, and encourage children to have questions about sex (Kelly, 1981; Segal & Segal, 1993). By doing this, children will get a message that "It is not a bad thing to ask about sex".

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Table 1

Percentages of Respondents with Liberal and Conservative attitudes toward Part III.

Question No	Attitudes	
	Liberal	Conservative
1	58.7	41.3
2	76.9	23.1
3	12.1	87.9
4	83.3	16.7
5	65.2	34.8
6	35.2	64.8
7	39.6	60.4
8	25.6	74.4
9	74.2	25.8
10	82.4	17.6
11	70.8	29.2
12	82.6	17.4
13	84.6	15.4
14	47.1	52.9
15	88.9	11.1

Table 2

Percentages of Both Genders with Liberal Attitudes

Question No.	Liberal	
	Female	Male
1	60.0	54.8
2	76.3	77.4
3	11.5	13.3
4	49.7	25.3
5	39.6	71.0
6	40.0	25.8
7	40.7	38.7
8	21.7	33.3
9	76.3	70.0
10	83.3	80.6
11	66.1	80.0
12	81.7	87.1
13	79.7	93.5
14	42.1	56.7
15	88.3	89.7

Table 3

Percentages of Subjects with Liberal Attitudes in different Age Groups

	Liberal		
Question No.	21-30	31-35	36 & Up
1	63.0	60.5	50.5
2	76.9	76.3	76.9
3	7.4	10.8	18.5
4	80.8	86.8	84.0
5	77.8	60.5	61.5
6	30.8	36.8	37.0
7	42.3	35.1	44.4
8	25.9	23.7	28.0
9	66.7	78.4	76.0
10	81.5	86.5	77.8
11	77.8	70.3	64.0
12	92.6	81.6	76.9
13	85.2	84.2	84.0
14	42.3	45.9	54.2
15	88.5	97.4	76.0

Table 4

Percentages of Subjects with Liberal Attitudes in Different Educational Levels

Question No.	Liberal		
	Junior H S	Senior H S	College
1	60.0	50.0	70.0
2	71.4	78.3	76.7
3	18.8	6.7	16.7
4	78.6	77.8	96.7
5	53.3	65.2	73.3
6	25.0	33.3	43.3
7	26.7	37.8	50.0
8	21.4	21.7	33.3
9	85.7	68.9	76.7
10	62.5	82.2	93.3
11	33.3	77.3	80.0
12	62.5	82.2	96.7
13	73.3	84.4	90.0
14	42.9	34.1	69.0
15	73.3	93.2	90.0

Table 5

Percentages of Subjects with Liberal Attitudes in Different Income Levels

Question No.	Liberal		
	11000-30000 /NTD (410-1130 USD)	31000-50000/NTD (1170-1890 USD)	51000 & up /NTD (1930 & up USD)
1	65.7	48.4	60.0
2	77.1	67.7	86.7
3	11.8	9.7	28.6
4	76.5	93.3	93.3
5	68.6	61.3	66.7
6	32.4	45.2	35.7
7	38.2	43.3	33.3
8	29.4	25.8	28.6
9	81.3	71.0	64.3
10	72.7	87.1	80.0
11	51.5	80.0	92.9
12	74.3	90.0	86.7
13	79.4	93.3	93.3
14	45.5	55.2	50.0
15	80.0	96.6	100.0

Table 6

Percentages of Subjects with Liberal Attitudes in Different Occupational Field.

Question #	Liberal					
	House keeper	Blue Collar	White Collar	Health Service	Teacher	Other
1	66.7	53.8	54.9	75.0	50.0	75.0
2	78.6	76.9	70.6	100	100	100
3	6.7	0	13.7	25.0	0	50.0
4	66.7	76.9	90.0	100	100	66.7
5	60.0	61.5	64.7	75.0	100	100
6	20.0	23.1	34.0	75.0	100	75.0
7	42.9	15.4	42.0	75.0	100	50.0
8	13.3	25.0	25.5	50.0	50.0	25.0
9	71.4	75.0	72.0	100	50.0	75.0
10	93.3	61.5	82.0	100	100	75.0
11	66.7	58.3	75.5	75.0	50.0	50.0
12	86.7	61.5	90.0	100	100	50.0
13	85.7	100	82.0	100	100	75.0
14	35.7	58.3	45.8	50.0	50.0	50.0
15	93.3	91.7	89.8	100	100	50.0

Figure 1.

Number of female and male respondents

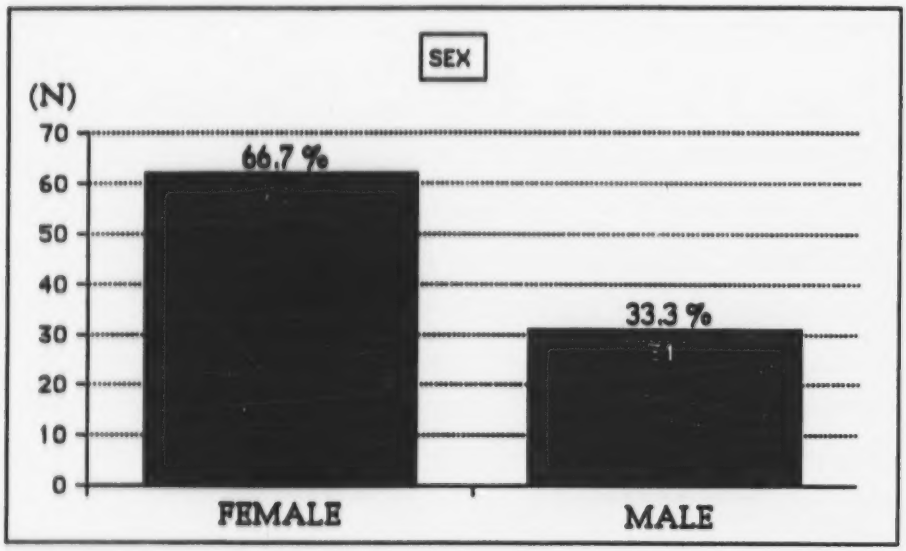


Figure 2.

Age distribution of respondents

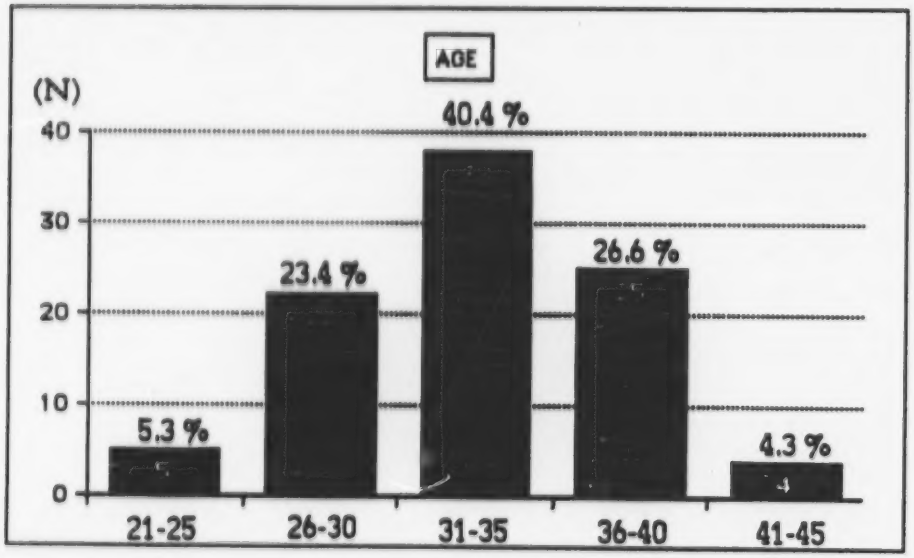


Figure 3.

Educational attainment of respondents

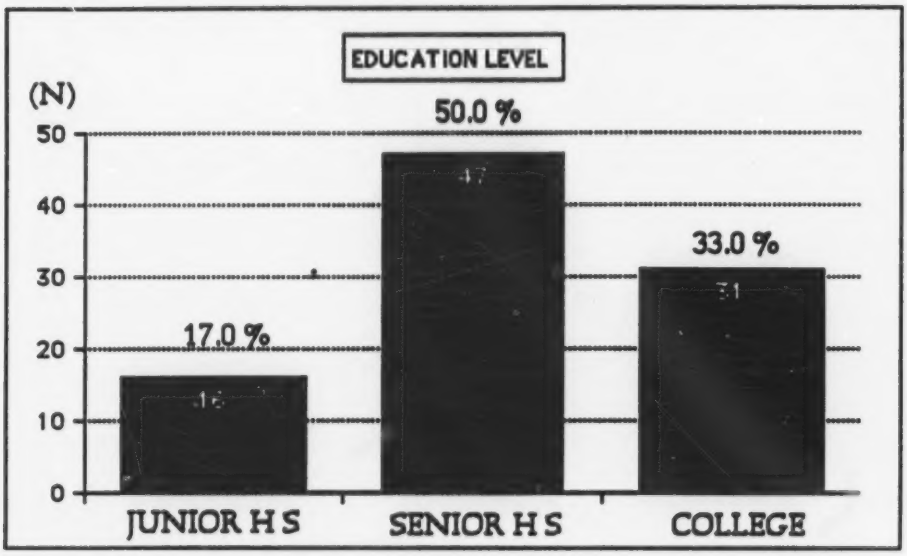


Figure 4.

Income level of respondents

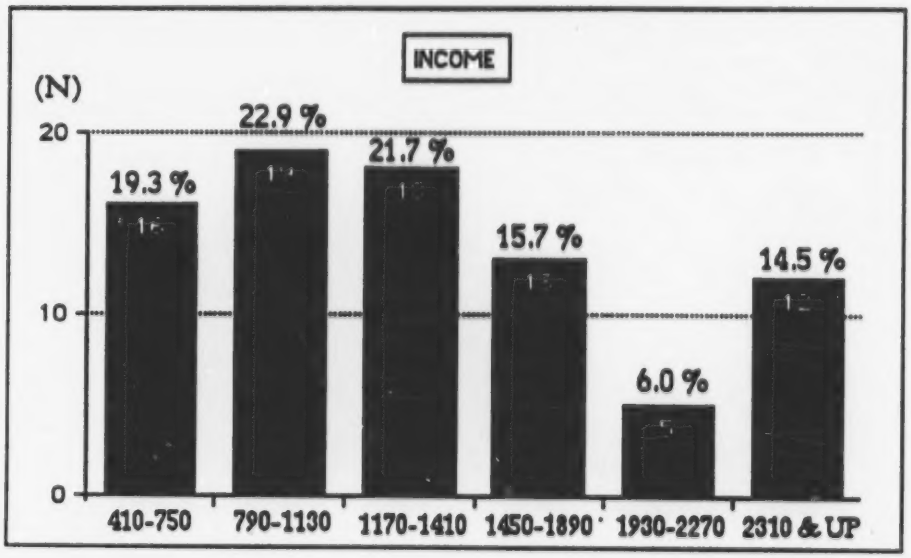


Figure 5.

Occupation of respondents

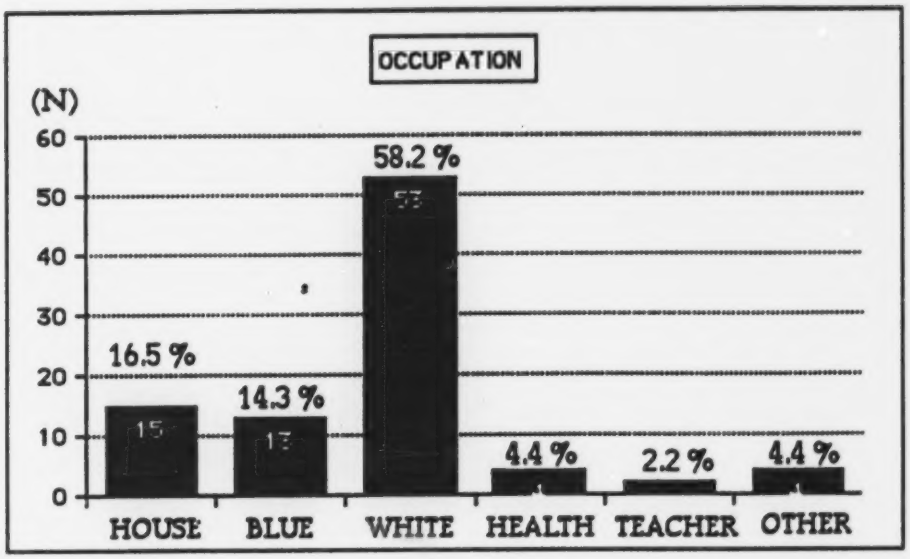


Figure 6.

The distribution of child's age of respondents

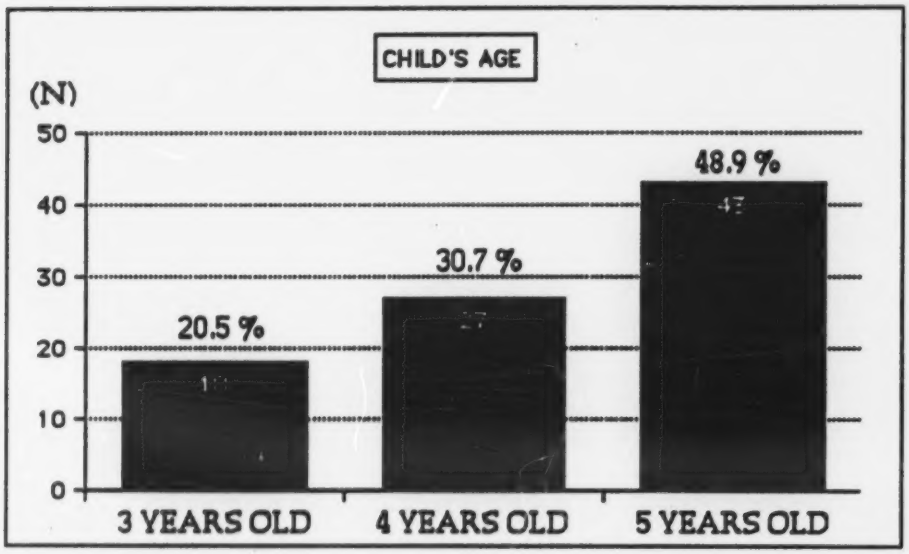


Figure 7.

If you can remember, at what age you asked your parents about sex or sex-related topic?

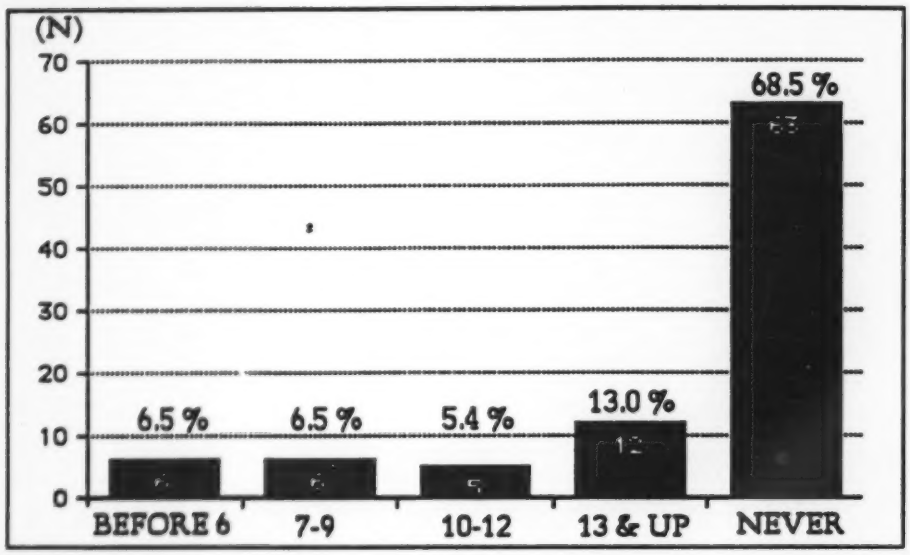


Figure 8.

Did your parents tell you where you came from?

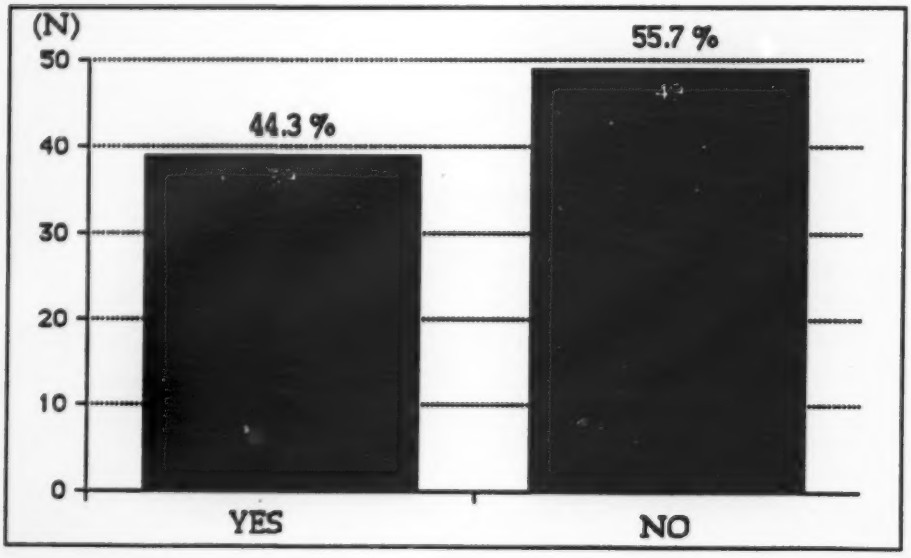


Figure 9.

What kind of answer did you get (choose one)?

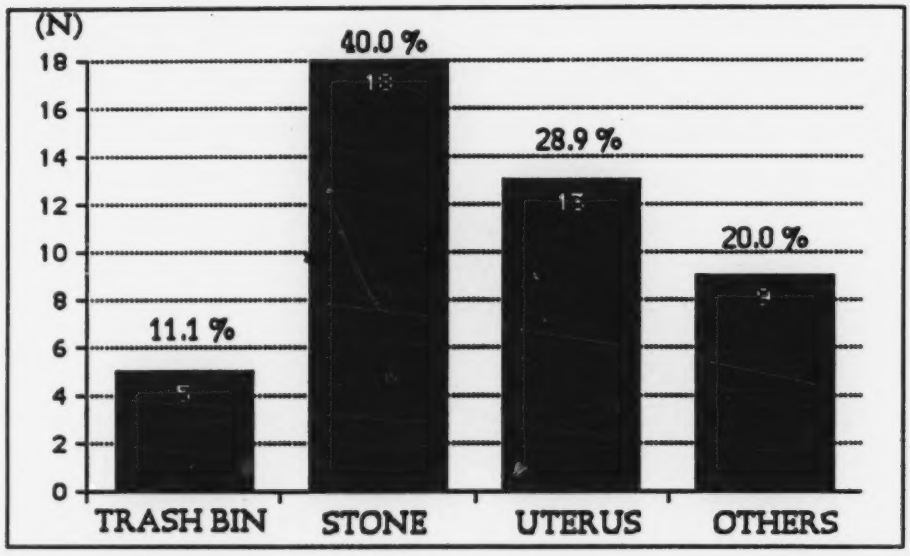


Figure 10.

Have your child(ren) asked about where they came from?

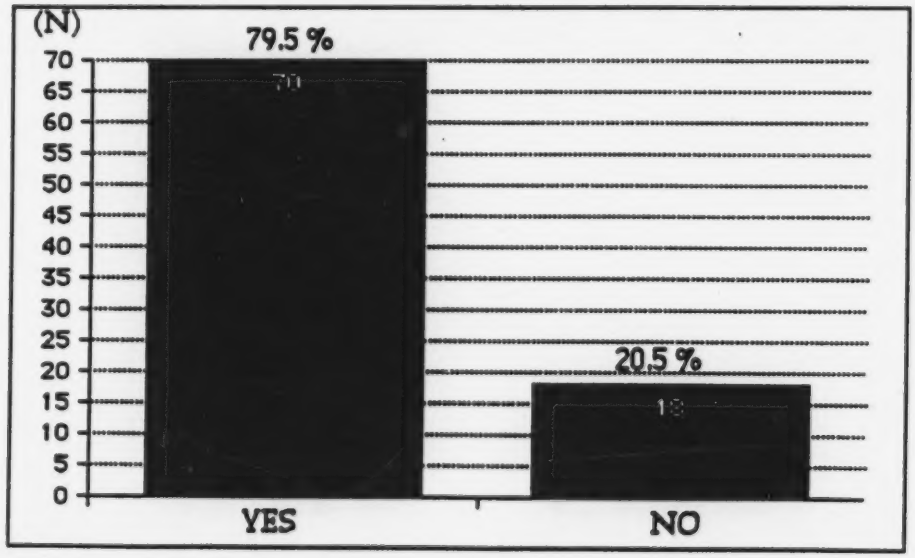


Figure 11.

What is your response?

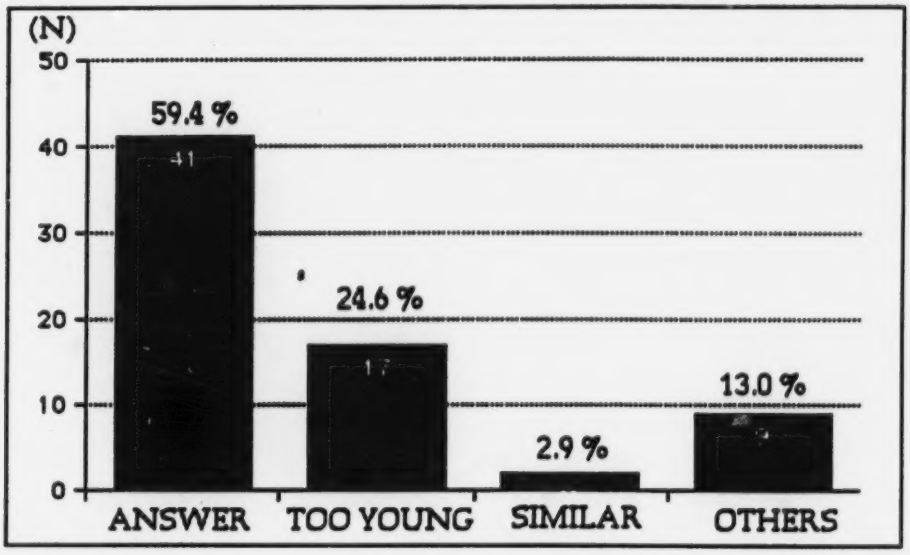


Figure 12.

Which answer are you likely to give to your children if they ask?

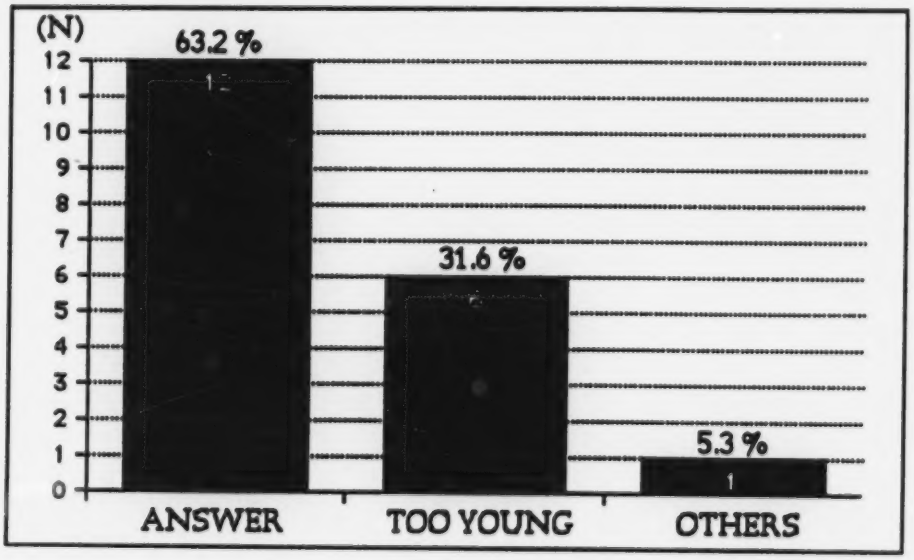


Figure 13.

1. I think sex is an embarrassing topic

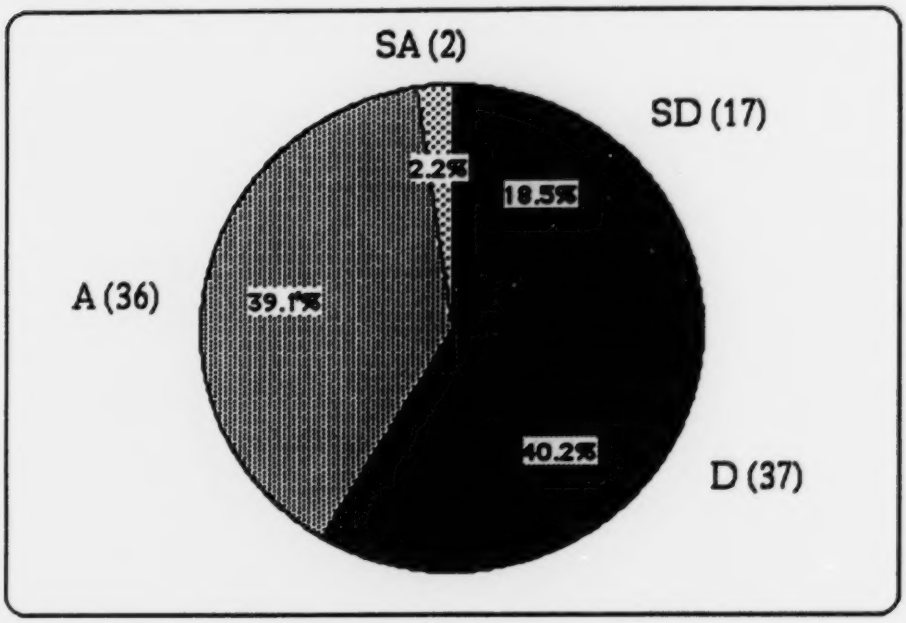


Figure 14.

2. Just adults understand what sex is

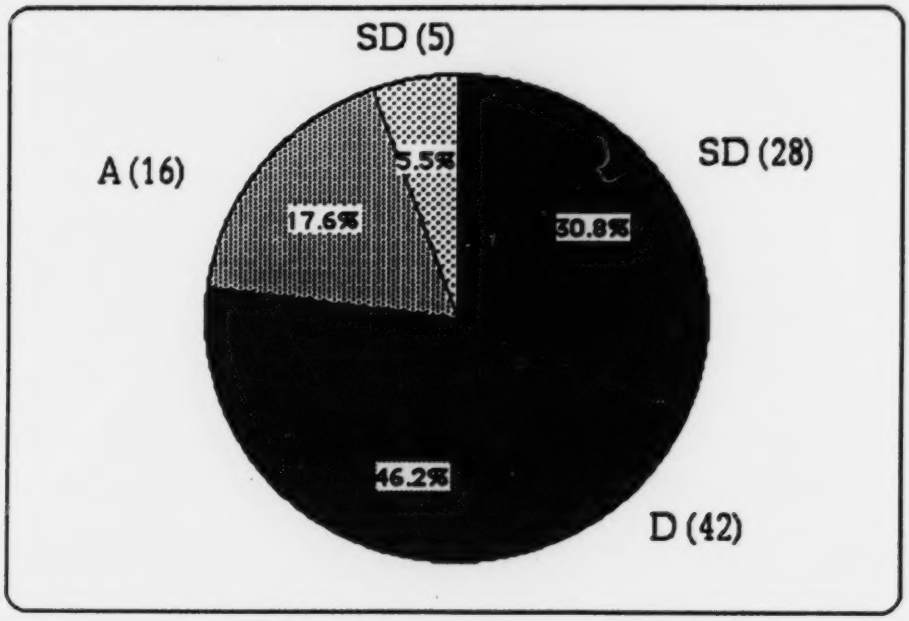


Figure 15.

3. Sex is not a moral issue

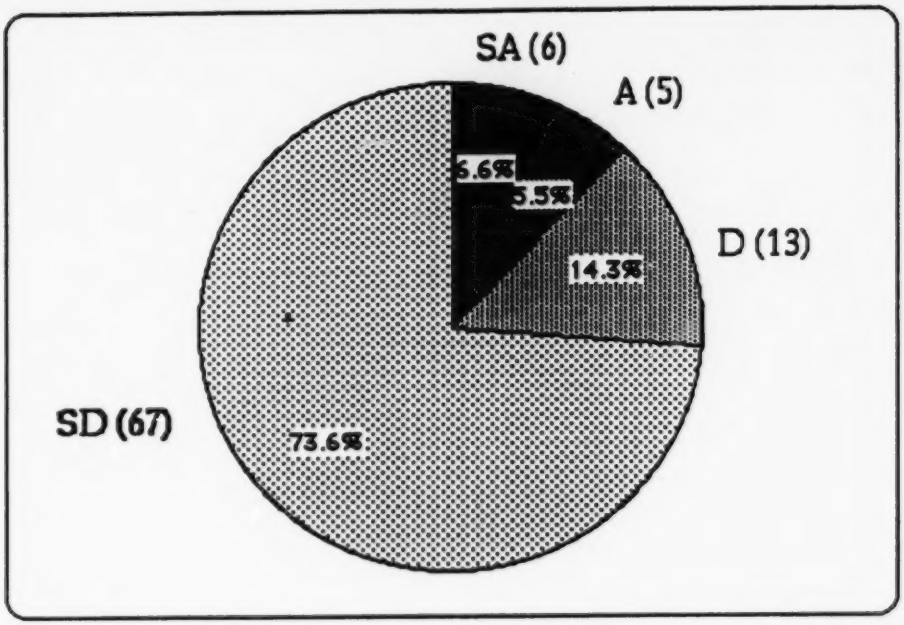


Figure 16.

4. I feel more liberal about sex than my parents do

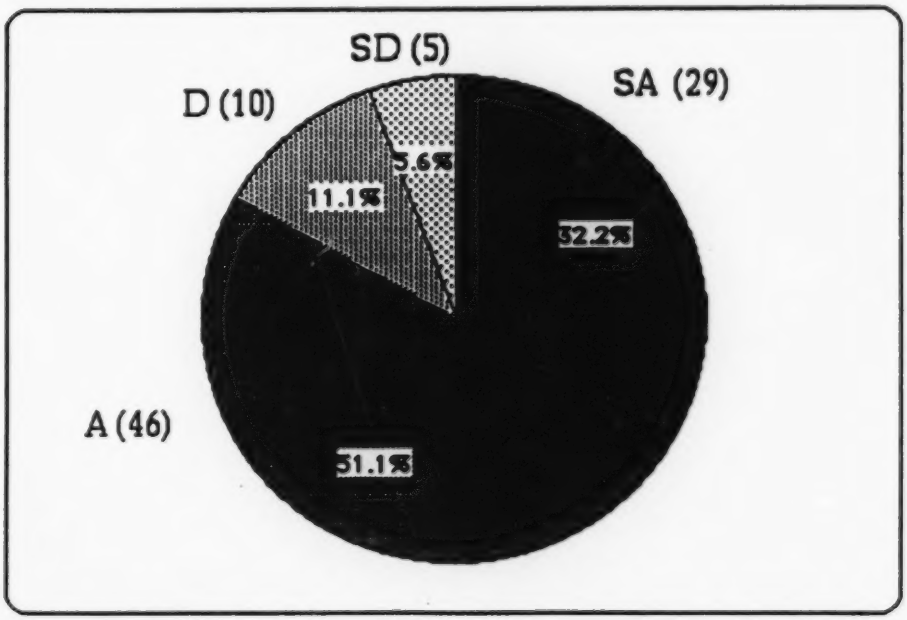


Figure 17.

5. Sex is a basic appetite like hunger

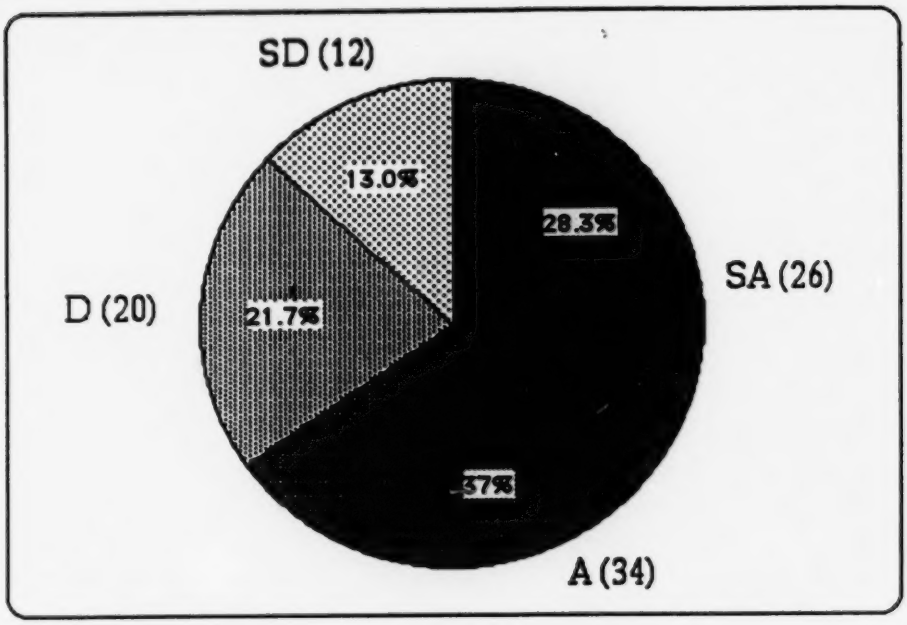


Figure 18.

6. Children will understand where babies come from when they grow up

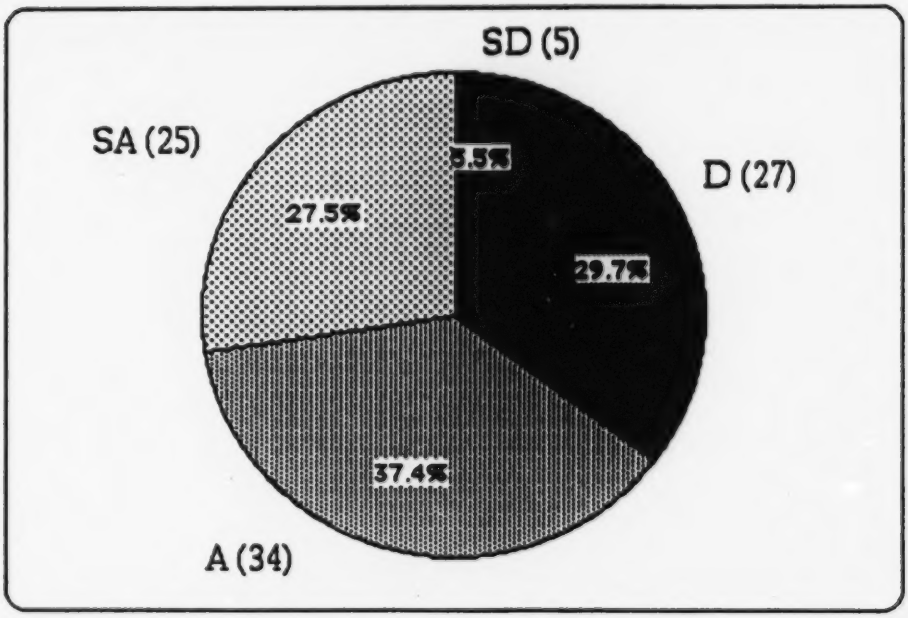


Figure 19.

7. Children should be punished for using dirty words

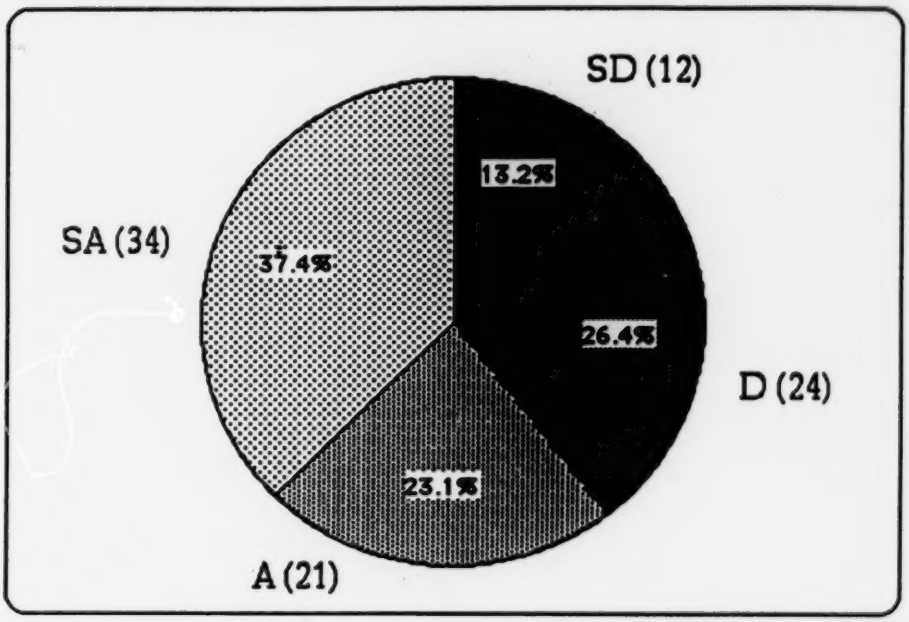


Figure 20.

8. Children should be forbidden to masturbate

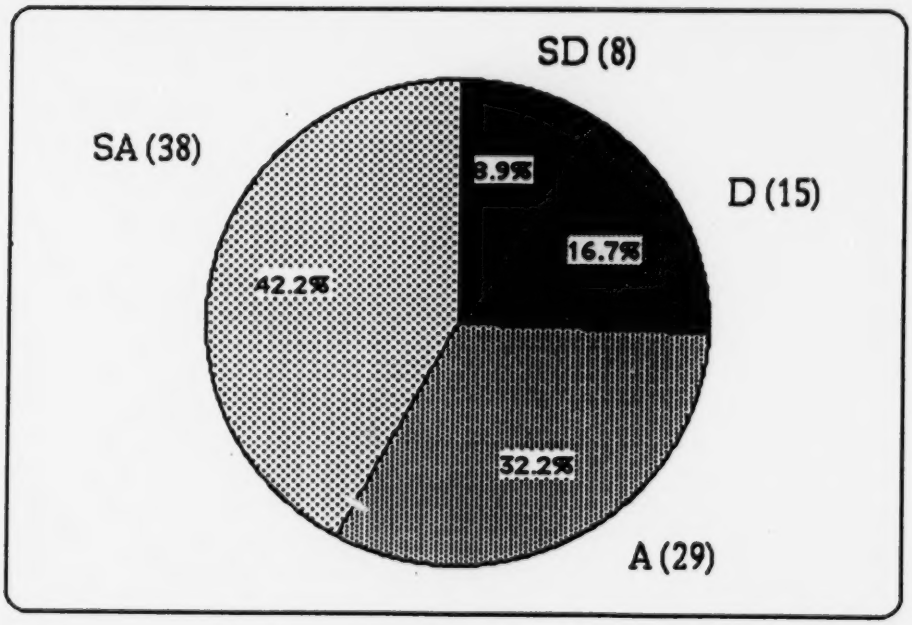


Figure 21.

9. It is silly to think of young children (under 5) as sexual beings

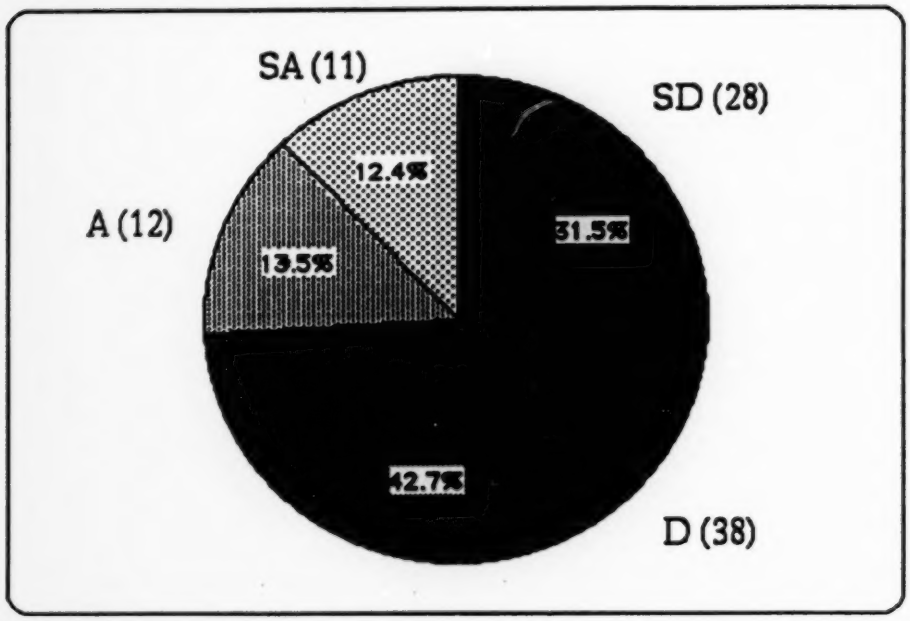


Figure 22.

10. 3-5 years old children do not need sex education

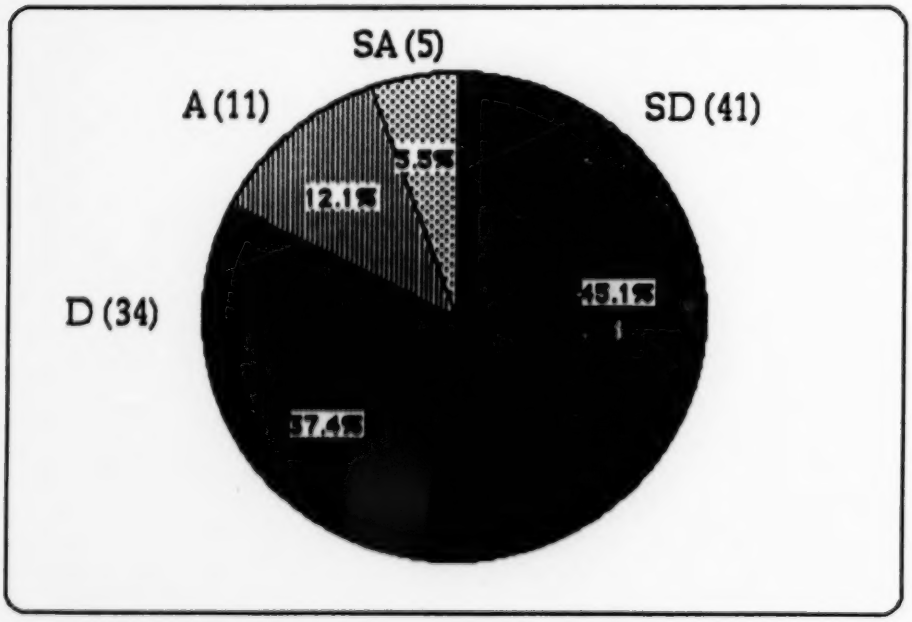


Figure 23.

11. Parents are more responsible than schools in providing sex education for young children

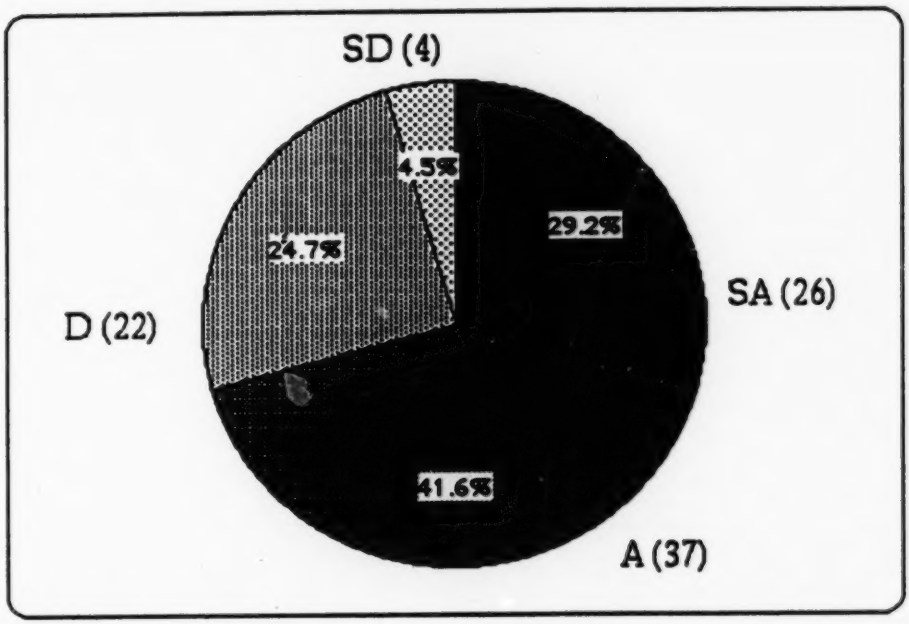


Figure 24.

12. There is nothing I would be afraid to discuss with children about sex education

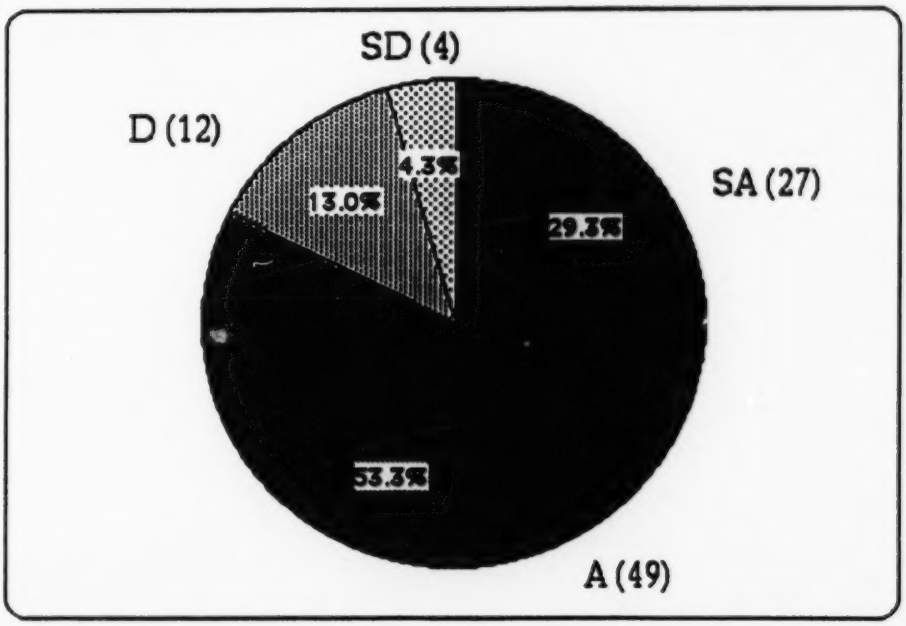


Figure 25.

13. I do not want preschools to provide sex education for my children

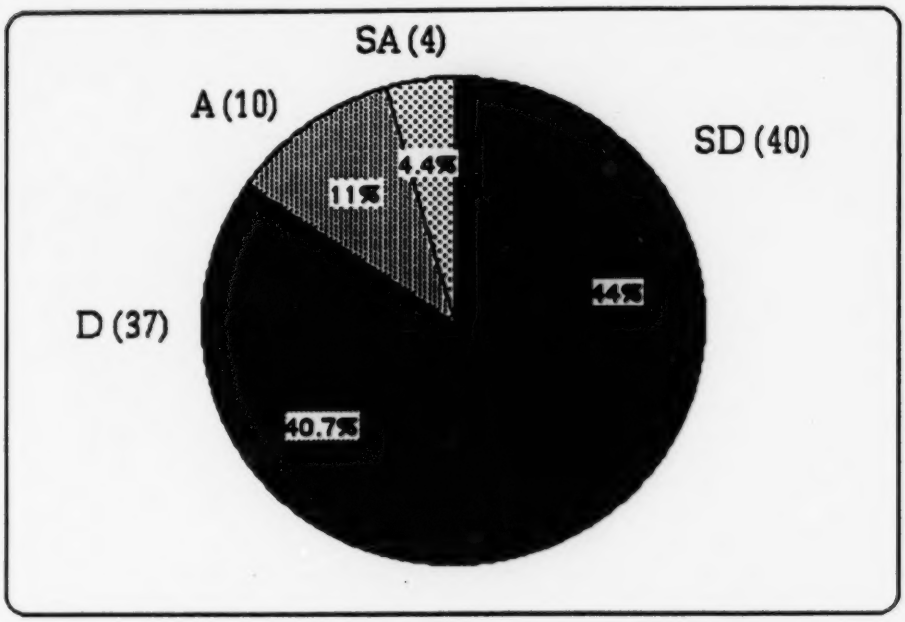


Figure 26.

14. I do not know how to communicate with my children about sex

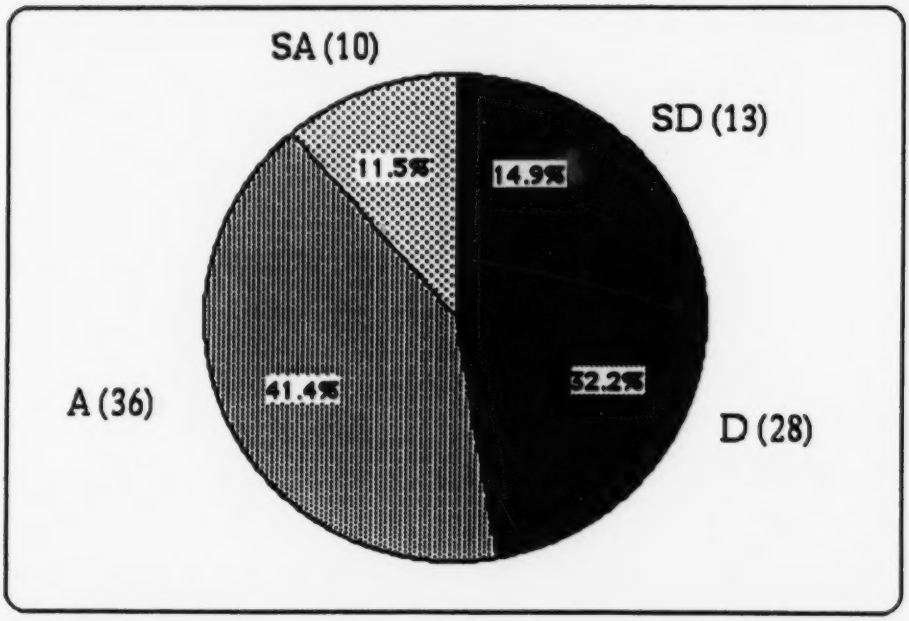
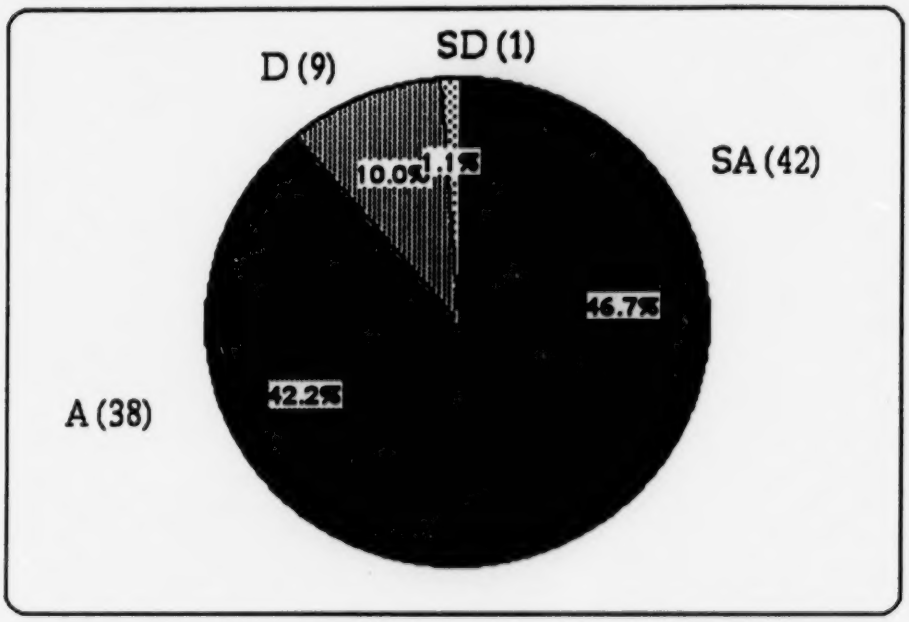


Figure 27.

15. I would like to teach my children about sex at home



Appendix A

Feb, 15 1994

Dear Parents,

I am a Master's student in the Curry School of Education at the University of Virginia. Currently, I am working on my final project. Since sex education is a controversial issue in the United States, there is considerable research on the topic. However, just a few of the studies refer to the preschool level. I am interested in finding out Taiwanese parents' opinions on sex education particularly as it relates to the preschool child.

It takes just 5-10 minutes to complete this survey. Please return it to Miss Lu as soon as you can. This survey is anonymous and confidential. The data will be used for research purposes only. Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Wei-chen Lu

SURVEY: ATTITUEDS TOWARD SEX EDUCATION
FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN AGES 3-5

PART I: Demographic Information (Please check the appropriate response)

1.Female _____ Male _____

2.What is your age?

Below 20 _____ 21-25 _____ 26-30 _____ 31-35 _____ 36-40 _____
41-45 _____ 46 and up _____

3.What is your education level?

Elementary _____ Junior High school _____ Senior High School _____ College _____

4.What is your approximate income per month (New Taiwan Dollars)?

$11,000-20,000 _____ $21,000-30,000 _____ $31,000-40,000 _____
$41,000-50,000 _____ $51,000 and up _____

5.What is your occupation?_____

6.How old is your child ?_____

PART II: Please check the appropriate response.

1.If you can remember, at what age you asked your parents about sex or sex-related topic?
Before 6 _____ 7-9 _____ 10-12 _____ 13 & up _____ Never _____

2.Did your parents tell you where you came from?
Yes_____, please answer Question 3.
No _____, please skip Question 3.

3.What kind of answer did you get (choose one)?
From trash bins_____
Came out of stones_____
From mother's uterus_____
From hospitals, but I am another person's child_____
Other (be specific)_____

4.Have your child(ren) asked about where they came from?
Yes_____, please answer Question 5.
Not yet_____, please answer Question 6.

5.What is your response?
I do not give any answer _____
I explain where children com from _____
I say, "You are too young to understand" _____
I give them an answer similar to what my parents told me _____
Other (be specific)_____

6.Which answer are you likely to give to your children if they ask?
I do not give any answer _____
I explain where children com from _____
I say, "You are too young to understand" _____
I give them an answer similar to what my parents told me _____
Other (be specific)_____

PART III Answer the following questions according to how you feel. Please circle one category:SD:Strongly disagree. D:Disagree. A:Agree. SA:Strongly agree.

	SD	D	A	SA
1.I think sex is an embarrassing topic.	1	2	3	4
2.Just adults understand what sex is.	1	2	3	4
3.Sex is not a moral issue.	1	2	3	4
4.I feel more liberal about sex than my parents do.	1	2	3	4
5.Sex is a basic appetite like hunger.	1	2	3	4
6.Children will understand where babies come from when they grow up.	1	2	3	4
7.Children should be punished for using dirty words.	1	2	3	4
8.Children should be forbidden to masturbate.	1	2	3	4
9.It is silly to think of young children (under 5) as sexual beings.	1	2	3	4
10.3-5 years old children do not need sex education.	1	2	3	4
11.Parents are more responsible than schools in providing sex education for young children.	1	2	3	4
12.There is nothing I would be afraid to discuss with children about sex education.	1	2	3	4
13.I do not want preschools to provide sex education for my children.	1	2	3	4
14.I do not know how to communicate with my children about sex.	1	2	3	4
15.I would like to teach my children about sex at home.	1	2	3	4

PART IV

1. What is your opinions about the current sex education in Taiwan?

2 What, if anything, should children between the ages 3 and 5 learn in sex education classes in school?

Appendix B

親愛的家長:

您好! 您是否想進一步了解您的小孩? 您的小孩是否問過"我從那裡來?"之類不易回答的問題? 此問卷的目的是希望了解現代台灣家長對幼兒教育的態度.其內容會提供您觀察及思考幼兒行為與動機的機會. 您只需5-10分鐘即可完成本問卷. 此問卷採不計名方式.所得資料絕非用於商業用途.請安心做答.完成後請儘快交給呂嘉珍或其他指定老師. 謝謝您的合作!

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2月15日 1994

問卷:家長對幼兒(3-5足歲)性教育的態度

第一部分: 基本資料 (請在適當的空格打勾)

1 女 _____ 男 _____

2 你的年紀為?
20 以下 _____ 21-25 _____ 26-30 _____ 31-35 _____
36-40 _____ 41-45 _____ 46 及以上 _____

3 你的教育程度是?
國小 _____ 國中 _____ 高中 _____ 大專/大學 _____ 以上 _____

4 你的月收入大約是? (以新台幣為單位)
1萬1-2萬 _____ 2萬1-3萬 _____ 3萬1-4萬 _____
4萬1-5萬 _____ 5萬1-6萬 _____ 6萬1及以上 _____

5. 你的職業是?_____

6 你上此學校的小孩(們)年紀為?_____

第二部分：請在適當的空格打勾

1 在你印象中，你大約何時開始問父母任何有關性的問題？
六歲之前 _____ 7-9歲 _____ 10-12歲 _____ 13歲及以上 _____
從未問過 _____

2 你的父母是告訴過你你那裡來？
是 _____，請接第 3 題
否 _____，請跳過第 3 題

3 你得到那種答案？
從垃圾場撿來 _____
石頭蹦出來 _____
醫院抱錯的 _____
從母親的子宮來 _____
其他（請簡述）_____

4 你的小孩是否曾問過"我從那裡來"？
是 _____，請接第 5 題
否 _____，請接第 6 題

5 你的反應或答案？
保持沉默 _____
告訴孩子正確的答案 _____
對孩子說"你還小，還不了解" _____
給一個類似與你的父母給你答案 _____
其他（請簡述）_____

6 如果你的孩子有此疑問，你的答案或反應是？
保持沉默 _____
告訴孩子正確的答案 _____
對孩子說"你還小，還不了解" _____
給一個類似與你的父母給你的答案 _____
其他（請簡述）_____

Appendix C

*Frequency of answers (frequency under five times) to Question 1 :What is your opinion about current sex education in Taiwan?

	Frequency
1. People should put more emphasis on adolescence sex education.	5
2. Schools should put more focus on sex education.	4
3. There is no age-appropriate sex education curriculum.	4
4. It is so so, ok.	3
5. Sex education should start at early ages.	3
6. Parents do not have enough knowledge about sexuality.	2
7. Sex education should start in elementary schools.	2
8. People lose morals nowadays.	2
9. Parents and teachers should work cooperatively.	2
10. It is not as open as other countries.	1
11. Do not have to learn whatever is proper or popular in other countries	1
12. Sex education motivates youths to experience sex.	1
13. People need more professional guidance and instruction.	1
14. Do not have to take it seriously.	1
15. People should emphasize more on morality teaching.	1

Appendix D

*Frequency of answers (frequency under five times) to Question 2 :What, if anything, should children between the ages 3 and 5 learn in sex education classes in schools?

	Frequency
1. Accurate and positive attitudes toward body organs	2
2. Learn how to clean and take care of one's body.	1
3. Reasons and desires for getting married.	1
4. The roles of both genders in marriage.	1
5. Learn to respect others.	1

*The following statements are parental opinions about sex education.

1. Introduce sex education in natural settings, like bathing with parents.	5
2. It is not necessary to provide sex education for young children for they are too young.	5
3. Should be age appropriate.	2
4. It is good to have sex education for young children.	2
5. Young children should not have questions about sex.	1
6. Should have a systematic curriculum.	1